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## My Problems in the War Department

by Secretary of War John W. Weeks



# How I Sketched Lincoln from Life

By FREEMAN THORPE

I WAS fifteen years old when I attended the Wisconsin State fair, while visiting relatives in Milwaukee, in September, 1850. I was a town lad, from Geneva, Ohio, and the farm exhibits at the fair did not attract me. But it was fun to mingle in the crowds and watch the fakirs. I arrived on the big day of the fair. There was to be a speech and the scoring of the prize stock.

I did not expect to enjoy the speech, but, like other boys, I wanted to be where the crowd was. The speaker was a lawyer from Illinois. I heard some of the old farmers scoff at the waste of time listening to a town fellow—a lawyer—talk about farming, for of course he couldn't tell them anything they did not know.

When the speaker rose, he was awkward and not at all impressive in appearance, but I listened, out of curiosity. He did not pretend to know much about farming. He spoke with deference to the old farmers in his audience, and just talked sensibly. And, somehow, he seemed to get the sympathy and interest of the crowd right from the start. It seemed to me to be a splendid speech. I decided, then and there, that I had listened to the greatest man that had ever lived. You see, I was young and impressionable.

That speech is in print, of course, and you can find it in Nicolay and Hay's "Life of Lincoln," for it was Abraham Lincoln who spoke.

"My first suggestion," said Lincoln, after some introductory remarks, "is an inquiry as to the effect of greater thoroughness in all departments of agriculture than now prevails in the Northwest—perhaps I might say in America. To speak entirely within bounds, it is known that fifty bushels of wheat, or one hundred bushels of Indian corn, can be produced from an acre. Less than a year ago I saw it stated that a man, by extraordinary labor, had produced of wheat what was equal to two hundred bushels from an acre."

An old farmer near me gave a grunt at that and exclaimed, "Shucks!" The speaker went on:

"But take fifty bushels of wheat and one hundred bushels of corn to be the possibility, and compare it with the actual crops of the country. Many years ago I saw it stated in a Patent Office report that eighteen bushels is the average crop throughout the United States, and this year, an intelligent farmer of Illinois assured me he did not believe the land harvested in that State had yielded more than eight bushels."

"Didn't cut my wheat at all," said the old farmer behind me. "'Twan't wuth cuttin'."

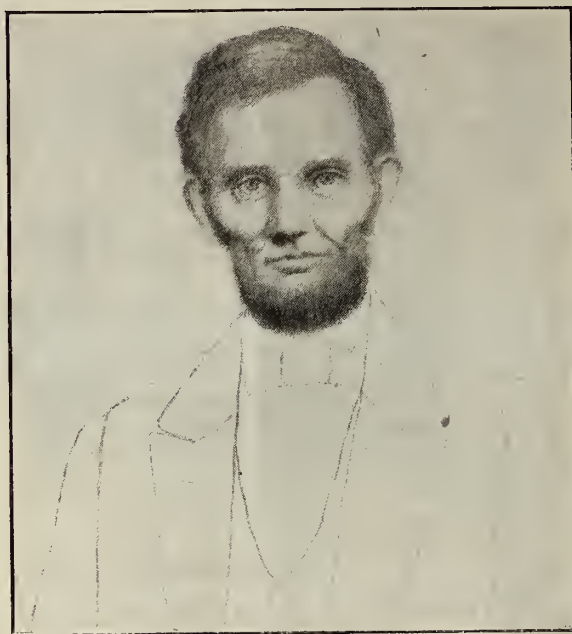
Then the speaker talked at length about putting more work on the land per acre—what we now know as intensive farming, and said:

"What would be the effect upon the farming interest to push the soil up to something near its full capacity? Unquestionably, it would take more labor to produce fifty bushels from an acre than it will to produce ten bushels from the same acre, but would it take more labor to produce fifty bushels from one acre than from five? Unquestionably, thorough cultivation will require more labor to the acre, but would it require more labor to the bushel?"

Remember that was long before there were any agricultural experiment stations or colleges or farmers' institutes in the world. Nobody thought of farming as a science; it was just what everybody was supposed to know by instinct, tradition and hard work. Not to know how to farm was to lack "horse sense." Lincoln was talking away ahead of his times, and I, a boy, was pivoting my entire life on that half-hour talk, for all my future dates back to that speech.

Lincoln was then a man of no fame. He had served one term in the House of Representatives, but had accomplished nothing. He had failed in business, and for seventeen years had been trying to pay off his creditors. He had tried to get an appointment in the U. S. Land Office, and failed; he had even run for Senator, but nobody paid much attention to his candidacy. He was a "has-been," a struggling country lawyer, with every reason to recognize his own mediocrity—but he didn't.

Two years after that speech of sixty



This is the original sketch drawn from life by Freeman Thorpe at Geneva, Ohio, when Abraham Lincoln stopped there on his way to Washington and his first inauguration. From this sketch Mr. Thorpe painted the Lincoln portrait which Congress bought for \$2,000 and which now hangs in the corridor of the Capitol at Washington.

years ago, I was at home in Geneva. I heard that a train which was coming that afternoon from the East had on board Mrs. Lincoln, wife of the newly elected President. I hustled about and stirred up the militia company of the town, and when the train pulled in we had the cannon and were firing a salute in honor of the future occupant of the White House.

Then I was introduced to Mrs. Lincoln as the boy who had caused the salute. She was pleased, and treated me very graciously. Some weeks after that, I wrote to President Lincoln and asked him to stop his inaugural train at Geneva, so I could make a sketch of him.

To my delight, Lincoln replied, agreeing to my request. I let it be known in Geneva that President Lincoln would honor the town by stopping there a few minutes, on his way to take office; and from sunrise

until the train arrived, every bell in Geneva kept up a continual ringing. People heard the noise, away out in the country, and came in to learn what it was all about; they thought the town was on fire.

When the train pulled in I was the first to clamber on to the platform of the President's car. There stood Lincoln ready to clasp my hand. Then I took my position on the next platform, and began my sketch, while the crowd pushed up to shake his hand. Of course that sketch was rough, but I got the likeness.

Then came the war; I enlisted and served in the 2nd Ohio Cavalry, fighting in the Shenandoah Valley. My health broke and I was sent on detached duty to Jeffersonville, Indiana, to recuperate. When I regained my health, I went on to Washington to rejoin my regiment. There I learned that the regiment had moved out of the Shenandoah and was fighting below Richmond. I could not immediately get to it. That was just before the first anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. With my precious Geneva sketch of Lincoln, I went to the War Department and asked for a furlough to go to Gettysburg and make another sketch of the President, for it had been announced that Mr. Lincoln would speak on that occasion.

I got the furlough, and rode on the same train with the President. I got an audience with the President, and showed him my finished drawing, made from the Geneva "shorthand" sketch, and he complimented it.

When we arrived at Gettysburg, we found a great crowd there, interested in the scenes of the battlefield, rather than in the program of speeches. There were many open graves, and battle-victims were being buried.

Only a comparatively small number of people gathered about the stand to hear the speeches. I stood within fifteen feet of Mr. Lincoln, as he sat on the platform. There I made another sketch. There is a wonderful difference in its expression from that of the Geneva sketch! The lines are deeper; the countenance more grave.

We listened two hours to the oration of Edward Everett, then the President stepped forward, a sheet of paper in his left hand. There he stood, his left foot advanced ahead of his right, and began to speak, gesticulating somewhat with both long arms. The crowd settled down to hear an hour's address, but it was all over in less than three minutes, and the President sat down. There was no applause. The audience was astonished. Three minutes, when they had expected an hour! The meeting silently broke up.

That evening President Lincoln attended a meeting in Gettysburg, called to consider some program regarding the management of the battlefield, but he stayed only a little while, then excused himself, to attend to some work in his car. That is the last time I ever saw Lincoln.

In 1871 I went to Washington with my two Lincoln sketches. They were the only known sketches from life of the martyr President, and that fact interested the Senators—especially Senators Sumner, Sherman, Bayard, Anthony, Logan and Trumbull.

"You are the only man who has sketched President Lincoln from life," they said. "You have a great gift for catching true likenesses with your pencil. We propose to build for you a studio on the roof of the Capitol, and give you the freedom of the floor of the Senate, so you can have every chance to study the faces of the men who are making history. You are not yet proficient in the technique of portrait-painting, but you can study that, and when you are prepared, you will paint a portrait of Lincoln from your life sketches, and Congress will buy it."

So they built the studio on the Capitol roof, over the Senate wing, and I occupied it for twenty years. I was twenty-seven years old when given that studio, but not until last year did I finish my portrait of Lincoln. When I showed the portrait to the Library Committee of the Senate, of which Senator Brandegee was chairman, the Committee agreed to recommend its purchase, and the Senate unanimously voted \$2,000 for it. The likeness now hangs in the corridor of the Capitol, next to the Senate.



Freeman Thorpe, dean of American portrait painters, with his canvas of Lincoln, recently purchased by the Government.